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ROMAN CHWALEK, GDR MINISTER OF RAILROADS

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Roman Chwalek has been associated with the railroad all his life. He was born on 24 July 1898 in Weihendorf, upper Silesia [now Wojnowice, Poland]. His father was stationmaster of the little railroad station in that town. After, Roman Chwalek finished public school he became an apprentice mechanic and finally became a machinist in RAW (Reichsbahn Repair Yard) Oppeln [now Opole, Poland]. He was drafted into the army during World War I and was re-employed by RAW Oppeln after that war.

Roman Chwalek's political career began in 1919 when he joined the USPD (Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany) only to change in ly 920 to the KPD (Communist Party of Germany). His political activity, however, was restricted to the trade union movement. Chwalek joined the union on 19 March 1919 and was expelled on 31 May 1924 because of his Communist activities. During the period 1919-1924 he also belonged to the Oppeln [Central] trade union council of the ADGB (General Federation of German Trade Unions), was a Communist city councilman, and since 1922 chairman of the trade union council of RAW Oppeln. In addition, he was at times a member of the district trade union council of the RBD (Reichsbahn Directorate) Breslau.

In April 1925 Chwalek joined the EdED (League of German Railroaders) and by January 1926 was active as the League's first agent in Oppeln. During 1927-1928 he became a member of the main trade union council at the Main Administration of the Deutsche Reichsbahn in Berlin. He was also active in the Reichsbahn social security fund (Betriebskasse) in Oppeln.

Roman Chwalek was simply a Communist union functionary. He was politically dependable and loyal to the party. But despite this he was honest and supported the rights of the working people.

On 20 November 1929 he was expelled from the EdED for seditious activities. Henceforth he worked exclusively for the KPD. He was assigned organizational work in the League of Railroaders in the RGO (Revolutionary Trade Union Opposition). In 1930 he was nominated and elected to the Reichstag from the 8th election district (Liegnitz). During the same year he made his first visit to the USSR. His dismissal from the Reichsbahn in 1931 for his Communist activities was only a formality for him by this time.

With the coming to power of the National Socialists, Chwalek went underground. Until his arrest in September 1933, Chwalek, as a member of the first illegal Land directorate of the KPD, directed with Franz Dahlem the resistance work of former RGO groups. In August 1934 he was sentenced to three years in the penitentiary for high treason. Upon serving his sentence he was sent to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp and released from there in 1939. Only a few months later, at the outbreak of World War II, he was again arrested. However, after 1940 he was able to work as a mechanic in a Berlin armament plant under police surveillance. In January 1945 he was arrested once more, only to be liberated by the Soviet troops when they entered Berlin.

Following the collapse of Germany, Chwalek rejoined the KPD and in 1946 the SED. He became first secretary and later chairman of the FDGB (Free German Trade Union Federation) in Berlin. It is to be noted that he participated with

- 1 -

STAT

Heinz Kessler (SED) in organizing the "spontaneous" demonstrations and riots in the Berlin City Hall in 1948, which led to the splitting of the city politically and administratively.

On 1 March 1949, Chwalek was relieved of his former assignment and put in charge of the Railroad Workers Industrial Union within the FDGB. This was a demotion for Roman Chwalek, caused by his inability to prevent the breaking up of the Berlin trade union movement and the establishment of the Independent Trade Union Opposition (UGO) in West Berlin.

Following the reorganization of the GDR government on 15 November 1950, Chwalek emerged as Minister of Labor. This seems to have ended his trade union work.

On 1 May 1953, Chwalek was appointed Minister of Railroads, replacing the former Minister of Transportation, Dr Reingruber.

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- 2 -